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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a narrative (in feminist style) of a debate round in the Lincoln-Douglas format to illustrate the principles of an intercollegiate debate round. In the context of the debate round, the paper examines the Toulmin model for argument and suggests an alternative model. The paper also challenges specific debate practices with alternative practices attempted within the framework of the narrative. (Contains 12 references.) (RS)

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A Feminist Perspective on Argumentation:

An Examination of the Toulmin Model

by

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A Feminist Perspective on Argumentation: An Examination of the Toulmin Model

The following narrative (in feminist style) is a debate round. The round is in Lincoln-Douglas format but useful in illustrating the principles of an intercollegiate debate round in general. During the debate the Toulmin model for argument is examined and an alternate model is suggested. Specific debate practices are also challenged with alternative practices attempted within the framework of the narrative.

Jane was sitting in her fourth debate round of the day. She was tired, her head was throbbing, and her obnoxious opponent was going on about the effectiveness of the United States to solve all human rights violations around the world. At the moment Jane was feeling violated by having to listen to this ridiculous debater and this ridiculous argument again. She marveled at her opponent's forceful delivery style and wondered why he felt he had to be so violent. After all, they were not there to convince the judge on the issues only to present argument for critical scrutiny and evaluation. His delivery style was not going to change the nature of his argument, but it might intimidate the judge into voting for his position anyway. How like a male to want to win by intimidation and force.

Jane had already heard this argument three times before and she knew intuitively that the premise it was based on was wrong, but she didn't have the specific evidence to

refute the argument. She would try to respond based on her analysis of the logic of the argument. She would also try an emotional appeal or two. Her strategy didn't work in the last two rounds but this time she had a female judge so hopefully this judge's perspective would be different. What the U.S. needs is a few good women, Jane thought, and then maybe it could get something done. What this debate round needs is a few good women, Jane continued to think. And then, like a lamp pushing back the darkness, Jane realized that a woman's perspective is exactly what this argument and this debate round needed. She would begin developing her new strategy in the next cross examination period.

Jane's opponent, Bob, is feeling very good about himself. He is confident in his debate strategy and judging from his opponent's nonverbals he is sure that she can not effectively refute his arguments. He doubted that anyone really could beat his argument. After all he had spent hours researching trouble spots in the world where the United States had intervened and had successfully returned peace and order and brought the beginnings of a civilized democracy to these non-democratic countries. What was even better was that most of these examples were obscure countries that had been previously ruled by tribal customs, and there was very little evidence to be found on these cultures at all. And since this argument had worked in two

previous rounds the argument should work again this time. He would know for sure if his strategy was working after the next cross examination.

Jane stood up for cross examination. She was excited about the ideas formulating in her mind. She thought it best to begin traditionally by questioning the logic of Bob's argument.

"Bob, the thesis of your argument at this point is that US intervention in non-democratic countries is justified because this intervention has brought peace and democracy to these countries, correct?" Jane could feel her heart beginning to pound as she anxiously awaited Bob's answer.

"Yes, that is correct." Bob replied matter of factly.

"To support this claim you provide two examples of where US intervention has been successful in the past, correct?"

"Yes, I give you two specific examples at the end of my case but I also give you the theoretical justification for this at the beginning of my case in Contention One." Bob explained.

"I see," said Jane. "Let me begin with the examples first. Do you think that two examples are enough to justify your claim?"

"As I just stated, I do not rely on just two examples, I also give you the theoretical justification as well. My

case provides for both inductive and deductive justification," responded Bob.

"Yes, I realize your position here. What I am attempting to do is to evaluate both of your justifications individually. Let me ask a different question. Do you think that the two examples that you present are typical examples which would be needed to justify your inductive reasoning?" asked Jane.

Jane knew that his induction was faulty based on the substantive warrants that would have to be made to make the claim valid. She also knew that she would never get Bob to admit that they were. Bob responded by explaining how his examples were significant and when taken with his theoretical justification could not be considered a hasty generalization.

Jane proceeded with her questioning. "You claim that the United States is justified in intervening because this intervention brings peace and democracy. Do we know that these people want peace and democracy?" Jane asked.

Bob looked confused for a second but then responded confidently with a slightly sarcastic tone, "Of course they want peace and my evidence in the first contention clearly states that democracy established throughout the world would benefit the United States in many ways."

"Who are you citing in your evidence?" Jane asked.

"This is according to James Smith, Political Scientist at Georgetown University.

"Has Mr. Smith ever been to these countries?"

"I guess so," Bob answered.

"Has he ever spoken to the people of these countries and asked them if they wanted a democracy?" Jane inquired.

"I don't understand the relevance of the question," Bob said. Bob really was at a loss for what Jane was getting at, so he offered "Mr. Smith is a qualified source on the establishment of democratic principles."

Although Jane did not think Mr. Smith qualified, she was doing more than attacking the authoritative warrant of the argument. She was also trying to get at a motivational warrant. In intercollegiate debate, authoritative and substantive warrants were always seen as holding more weight than motivational warrants. This practice imposed a hierarchial judgement that Jane felt was unjustified. Why should one type of warrant have more strength than another? It seemed obvious to her that, in this case, it was the motivational warrant that needed to be addressed. Bob was assuming that these tribal people in these non-democratic countries held the same value systems as those expressed by most Americans. She was sure these people had different wants and needs than those being forced upon them. But her cross examination time had expired. She would have to make

this point in her next speech. Jane was satisfied, however, that she had laid the ground work for her strategy. If only she could figure out a way of escaping from the rigid debate and argumentative structures that intercollegiate debate competition impose on argument. Hopefully this judge wouldn't mind a little experimentation.

Sally, the judge, was laughing to herself. She had begun laughing when she had first heard Bob's argument. How ridiculously presumptive of him to assume that peace and democracy were good by everyone's standards. Even if he had had a hundred examples that were all typical they would not have justified the rape of a culture. But as a judge she was suppose to evaluate the validity of the argument without allowing her own personal biases to influence her decision. She remembered back when she debated. It was satisfying at times to see an argument work or to find the flaws in an opponent's argument. But she was not a competitive person. She was bothered by the fact that the judge had to proclaim a winner, thus implying that one person's arguments or the person themselves were somehow superior. She also frequently felt trapped by the structure of argumentation as well as the strict structure of debate. There were the usual biases against women. Men were seen to have more credibility. Women had to provide more backing for their arguments than men. But her restlessness was more then discrimination.

Debate argumentation generally focused around the Toulmin model for argument. Because of the time restrictions in debate debaters tried to establish their conclusions in the quickest manner. Thus, universal warrants with little to no backing became a norm. Arguments that were not deductive in nature were suddenly forced into a model based on deduction. If the argument fit the model it was considered valid. Sally knew there was more to justification than fitting into a model. The meanings and values behind the words give an argument life. Were Bob's arguments valid? In intercollegiate debate it didn't seem to matter.

By the end of the cross examination Sally's laughter had turned into a laugh of affirmation and realization at the strategy that Jane was taking. Was this female debater going to leave the artificial structure imposed on her and do what Sally herself had been afraid to do as a debater, but now realized as a judge needed to be done? "If only Jane has the courage to see it through to completion. This could prove to be a very rewarding experience" Sally thought hopefully.

Jane's mind was working furiously. She had to speak next and didn't have much preparation time left. She would attempt to reach out to the judge to help the judge to see the argument as Jane is seeing it.

"To begin, I request that the judge shift the judging

paradigm of this debate from one of weighing the factual evidence to one of individual empowerment and consensus building. When we are dealing with the lives of a people, what one or a hundred experts say about them is irrelevant even if logically correct within the Toulmin structure of the argument. What is important is each individual within that society. I request that the judge take the position of helping to determine what we can do in this room to express solidarity for these other cultures and to help them empower themselves to be themselves." Sally smiled and nodded acceptance of the new paradigm. Yes, Jane was going to do it! For a split second Sally wondered what the tournament director would think of this but decided it wasn't important. Bob looked confused.

Bob had no idea what Jane was talking about. He had never heard of such a judging paradigm. "But," he reassured himself, "I have tradition and logic on my side. Jane provides no evidence to justify this shift in judging paradigms. And I have plenty of evidence to show that these people have been unable to govern themselves in past."

"At the heart of Bob's argument is the assumption that the United States is justified in forcing its culture on another culture because everyone wants to be like America. I propose that this assumption is wrong," Jane continued. "These people have an established culture. We do not know

what kind of culture. We do not know their customs, their values, their way of seeing the world, and we immediately assume that because it is not our way it is less than ours. This is a very arrogant and selfish view and one that only a patriarchal society would hold. For years those in power have suppressed anyone who is different than themselves. They have done it and continue to do it within the American society. Now my opponent asks you to condone the same oppression on another society." Jane has walked out from behind the podium is now sitting next to the judge talking directly to her. Bob is busy looking for evidence justifying the American way of life.

"Imagine, if you will, what life is like in these tribal communities. They live the way of their ancestors. They spend the days working to sustain life and family and community. Each person is important to the life of the tribe. If you close your eyes you can see the women going about their daily routine. Hear their songs. Feel their movements. Become one with their thoughts." Jane and Sally reach out and touch their hands together. They stretch their beings and seem to become aware of the women in this other culture. There is a sense of oneness, of communication. When they open their eyes they are both flushed from the experience. They both know that it would be wrong to forcefully impose another culture on this

culture.

Bob cleared his throat. Jane, feeling a little sorry for Bob (only a little) tried to bring him into the experience.

"You see Bob it's like this. I remember when I was a child and my mother insisting that I take dance lessons. My mothers intentions were good. She believed that the discipline involved in dance would help me in my future endeavors. And I was a rather clumsy child and my coordination would only benefit from dance. After all, she had had dance lessons as a child and had always regretted her decision to stop. So, even though I was not totally aware of what I was getting into, I went. It was wrong. This dance culture was not appropriate for my thinking, for my way of doing things. No matter how hard my teachers tried and no matter how hard my mother pushed me to practice, I was still a clumsy, awkward little girl who disliked the structure she was being forced into. Fortunately, my mother finally realized this and took me out of dance.

"The same is true for the tribal cultures in the non-democratic countries about which you were talking." Jane tried to explain. "Even though we may think it is the right thing to do because it has worked for us, at least in your perspective it has worked, does not mean that it would work

for them or that they would even want to try. And if we did impose our culture and it didn't work what would they do? It is not as simple as taking me out of dance. We would have disturbed the total fabric of their existence. They would never be able to return to their original culture because of the forced exposure to ours. We have to let them empower themselves, we cannot do it for them."

Jane and Sally waited for Bob to respond. Slowly he got up and went to the podium.

"For my rebuttal I would like to begin with the observation that none of my opponent's arguments were supported with evidence. How can she expect you, judge, to buy an argument without the proper data . . ."

Sally and Jane smiled at each other and shook their heads together. Sally had been right. This had been a rewarding experience. Should she interrupt Bob and try to explain to him why what he was saying was no longer relevant? She knew it was probably a hopeless cause but the educator in her felt that she at least had to try. She spent the duration of his speech formulating her thoughts.

"Bob, you are trying to persuade me that your arguments are better than Jane's because they are the most valid based on their fit into an artificial model of argumentation, the Toulmin model. Now I'll grant you that Toulmin is a very good tool for the analysis of some forms of argument.

However, what Jane has offered is a shift in the judging paradigm to one of empowerment. This empowerment does not just apply to the people in the countries mentioned in your affirmative case but to the people in this debate round and ultimately to the people of the world as well. Thus, I am now filtering all that is offered through its ability to aid in empowerment."

"So the ability to aid empowerment now becomes the warrant for all arguments?" asked Bob, still confused and still hanging on to the old structure.

"No, it is more than that," sighed Sally. She knew this would be difficult. "The use of one warrant implies a simplicity that does not exist. Every argument, indeed every statement, is made up of multiple thoughts, feelings, values, that all contribute to its worth. Toulmin makes an argument appear two dimensional and linear. No argument is only two dimensional and few are linear. When you present your arguments you are doing everything in your power to convince me of their validity while ignoring these other dimensions of the argument.

"Instead of trying to overpower me with <u>your</u> "logic" layout the argument in front of me with all its dimensions so that I too may see it and feel its nature and then decide for myself whether to accept the argument or reject it. This is what Jane did for me. She helped me to envision her

argument and to feel her argument not just from her perspective but from the perspective of those that were the object of that argument. The Toulmin model could never account for all of this."

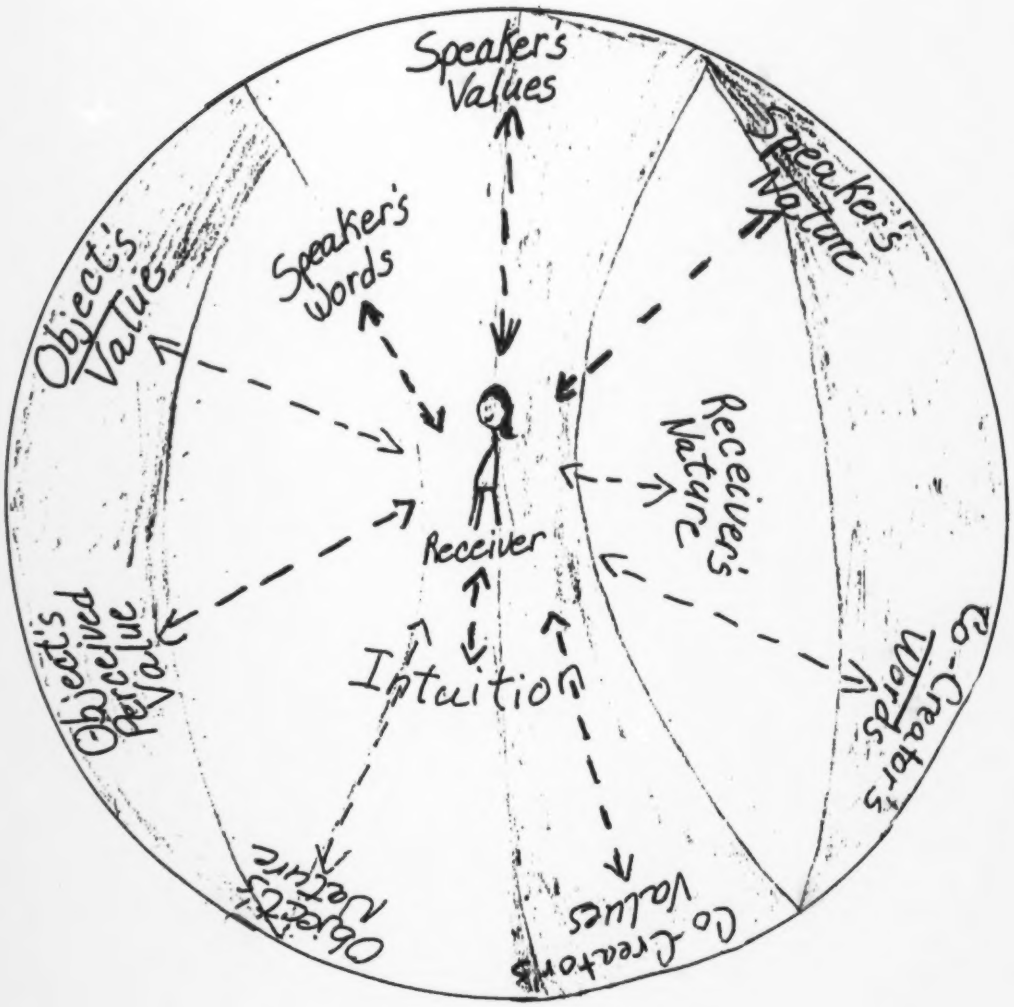
"Why couldn't you just have multiple argumentation models for the one argument?" Bob asked.

"First of all, no one would take the time to create all the models for one argument," continued Sally. "But more importantly, You are still trying to force a multi-dimensional concept into a two dimensional model. An argument loses its very essence by doing this and could even distort the meaning of the argument itself."

"Is there a model for your approach to argumentation?" Bob inquired.

Sally thought for a moment. "Not that I am aware of." she replied. "But let me see if I can construct one for you."

"The model would have to be three dimensional at least but let me try to get the basics on paper if you can continue to imagine that this would be three dimensional." Sally sketched the following diagram:


Speaker's Values
Speaker's Nature
Speaker's Words
Object's Values
Receiver's Nature
Receiver
Object's Perceived Value
Intuition
Co-Creator's Words
Object's Nature
Co-Creator's Values

"Let me explain what I've drawn. At the center of the circle is the intended receiver of all the various messages. Around this person are all the aspects of any argument. First I'll deal with the speaker's dimension. The values that a speaker holds will affect the topic and the formation of the argument presented. If something is of great concern to someone they are more likely to want to discuss it with someone else. These values are also reflected in the speaker's word choice. Semantics has a direct impact on the way a message is received. The speaker's nature refers to a speaker's inclination to use a form of argumentation over another form. For example, some people are storytellers. They prefer to illustrate their points through story, while others prefer the use of science, or formal logic, etc. The form they choose is in that person's nature.

"The object that is being talked about also has a value of its own as well as a perceived value. The perceived value is different for the speaker as well as the receiver. Both aspects of the perceived value will affect the impact that the argument has on the receiver. The object's perceived value by the speaker will affect the way in which the speaker communicates her/his ideas to the receiver. The object's perceived value by the receiver will affect the way in which the speaker interprets the information that he/she is receiving.

"The receiver also has values and a nature that affects the reception of the arguments. A person will base their judgments on what they hold as valuable. They will also interpret information based on these values as well as their individual nature. Some people are more receptive to stories than to formal logic, or science, etc. All of this comes into play when determining the acceptance of an argument.

"The last element on the circle is intuition. As much as men try to belittle its worth or its existence, intuition plays an important role in the processing of information and in determining its acceptance or rejection. When an argument is before you, you may be able to say, yes that sounds okay. But there is something inside you which says, no, something is wrong. You may not be able to identify that something specifically but your intuition tells you that it is there." Sally tried to ignore the smirk on Bob's face. She went on.

"The model is circular because all these dimensions are around us at all times. They don't come at us from one direction but from many. Remember, this model is three dimensional, like a ball. And like a ball it rotates freely in space with some dimensions being more obvious at certain times than at others. But all dimensions are always there somewhere. It is also circular to illustrate that the

information is laid out there for the receiver to accept or reject on their own. No one is trying to forcefully persuade the receiver of anything. The receiver makes the choice to accept or reject, this is empowering not overpowering.

"The arrows within the circle simply illustrate the two-way process of the communication involved. As the dimensions around the receiver affect the receiver so does the receiver affect the perceptions of the dimensions. Since all are being received and interpreted simultaneously the communication of the argument can be considered transactional.

"When all of these elements are working together the receiver is empowered to make her own choices. When many are discussing an issue and laying their arguments on the table, they are empowering each other to come to the best possible answer."

Sally was continuing to think about the model she had just created when Bob interrupted her thought processes.

"Well, that's very interesting but not very practical for judging debates," Bob said, obviously irritated. Bob was realizing that he had lost this debate and he wasn't real sure why. After all it was Jane who did not follow the regular format.

Sally just smiled. She knew it was hopeless. Sally

thanked both debaters for the enjoyable experience. Jane and Bob packed up their evidence and debate paraphernalia while Sally tried to decide what to write on the ballot. After thinking for a few minutes she decided that any explanation would be wasted on Bob and Jane's male coaches. So she just wrote, "Oral critique given after round." On the line where she had to indicate a winner she wrote, "womankind."

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